

Alyson Buckman: "What is Your Childhood Trauma?!": Living with Trauma in the Whedonverse

Joss Whedon's characters regularly experience trauma. Buffy, of course, is perpetually under attack. However, only some of her experiences result in emotional trauma, including the aftermath of sex with Angel, reliving her time in a mental institution, and the death of her mother. Angel experiences trauma as well, notably in his experiences with the First and in the loss of his son, Connor. Mal experienced trauma in that iconic moment in the original pilot for *Firefly* in which he stands at Serenity Valley and loses his faith in God. River is traumatized by her experience with the Alliance. Echo is traumatized repeatedly within the scope of *Dollhouse*. The flashbacks of the *Age of Ultron* hint at the trauma experienced by Black Widow. Phil Coulson's return to life from death and the processes used to effect that return result in lasting trauma for Coulson as well. There are numerous other examples.

Emotional, rather than physical, trauma will be the focus of this discussion. How do Whedon's characters learn to cope with the emotional traumas they have encountered? What is the ultimate effect such trauma has on these characters? These questions will be considered in the context of perspectives on trauma, memory, and history. It is my perspective at this time that Whedon uses trauma not only for dramatic tension and for character growth, but also to repeatedly illustrate the need to know and work with the past in order to be empowered and effective in the world.